expressed their opposition to VAT. I would like to ask the hon. Finance Minister whether, in spite of the opposition expressed by these two big States, this time, at least, the 1st April deadline will actually be met.

SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I respect the State Finance Ministers. I respect the State Chief Minister. State Chief Ministers, in a conference presided over by the then hon. Prime Minister, decided to introduce VAT. State Finance Ministers, surely under instructions from their State Chief Ministers have participated, in the last seven years, in several dozen meetings of the Empowered Committee. And they have decided that VAT will be introduced on the 1st of April. Now, the hon. Member, Shri Jairam Ramesh has referred to two States. Presumably, he has referred to Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Now, in the case of Uttar Pradesh, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh has met me on more than one occasion, and he has assured me that subject to one or two administrative difficulties that he will endeavour to overcome, he is also a party to the decision to introduce VAT on the 1st of April, I accept his word and I believe he will introduce it on the 1st of April. As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, in the Budget speech, the Tamil Nadu Finance Minister stated that if there was a consensus in the House, Tamil Nadu will also introduce VAT on the 1st of April. I believe, there will be a consensus in the House in Tamil Nadu, because all the other parties belong to the UPA and the UPA's Common Minimum Programme makes a commitment that VAT will be introduced shortly. Therefore, all the UPA political parties in the Tamil Nadu Assembly and the Tamil Nadu Government are of one frame of mind, I don't see any reason why VAT will not be introduced in Tamil Nadu on the 1st of April. I accept the words of all the State Finance Ministers that they will introduce VAT on the 1st of April.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Next Question, 186.

SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM: Sir, it is the same Question. It is on VAT Sir, it has already been covered.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, next Question, Question No. 187.

Measures to improve the Service of AI

*187. DR. AKHILESH DAS: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a proposal to revamp the existing fleet of Air India and the quality of service of the "Maharaja";

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps so far taken and being taken to implement the proposal?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) to (c) Constant efforts are being made by Air India on a continuous basis to revamp and upgrade the existing facilities on board its aircraft and quality of service to the passengers on ground. The facilities being revamped/upgraded on the aircraft are as under:

(i) Flat beds in First and Slumberettes in Executive class have been installed in all B747-400 aircraft.

(ii) PTVs are available on some of the dry leased aircraft in all classes. First and Executive class passengers have the options of watching films of their choice on personal DVD players.

(iii) Refurbishment of the interiors of A310-300 and B747-400 aircraft- replacement of seats, carpets and curtains, upgradation of galleys and toilets, upgradation of in-flight entertainment system etc.

(iv) Upgraded Amenity Kits for First and Executive class passengers.

(v) Wider choice of duty free sales on board.

Air India is also taking the following steps to upgrade the quality of their services to the passengers:-

(i) Implementation of E-ticketing system on India/USA/India and India/ UK/India routes,

(ii) Inter Airlines through Check-in with other airlines over the network facilitates passenger check-in from origin to destination,

(iii) Upgradation of Maharajah Lounge at Mumbai,

(iv) Meet and Greet facilities at CSI Airport, Mumbai for First and Executive class passengers.

Air India has already inducted 18 aircraft on lease and had finalized arrangement for induction of 12 more aircraft on lease to meet its capacity expansion requirements pending purchase of aircraft.

In addition to above Air India Board has also approved a fleet acquisition plan which envisages the acquisition of 18 X B 737-800 aircraft for its new airline subsidiary, Air India Express and 50 aircraft for Air India. A Project Report for the induction of 18 B737-800W aircraft for Air India Express has been submitted to the Government.

डा॰ अखिलेश दास: माननीय सभापति महोदय, माननीय मंत्री जी ने विस्तार से अपने उत्तर में बताया है। इन्होंने एअर-इंडिया में जो नई स्कीम लागू की हैं, उसके लिए तो मैं उनको बधाई देता हूँ, लेकिन मंत्री जी ने जैसा कहा है कि नए एअरक्राफ्ट्स के परचेज के लिए प्रस्ताव भारत सरकार को दिया है, जहां तक मैं समझता हूँ कि जो नए एअरक्राफ्ट्स लेने हैं, उनके लिए निश्चित रूप से हिन्दुस्तान का जो एअरपोर्ट इन्फ्रास्ट्रक्चर है, उसको भी डवलप करना होगा। सर, एक समस्या हर बार आती है, खासतौर से हिन्दुस्तान में, क्योंकि विंटर सीजन एक ऐसा सीजन होता है, जो ट्युरिस्ट्स को यहां सबसे ज्यादा अट्रेक्ट करता है.

श्री सभापति: आप क्वैश्चन करिए।

डा॰ अखिलेश दास: सर, मैं मंत्री जी से यह पूछना चाहता हूँ कि कि कोहरे की वजह से जो एअरक्राफ्ट्स के लैंडिंग और टेक-ऑफ करने में प्रोब्लम आती है, उसके लिए पायलट की जो प्रोपर ट्रेनिंग होनी चाहिए और जो हर एअरपोर्ट पर इसके लिए इन्स्ट्रूमेंट्स खरीदने हैं, उसके लिए क्या कोई प्रावधान किया गया है?

श्री प्रफुल्ल पटेल: सभापति जी, माननीय सदस्य ने एअर-इंडिया की जो प्रगति हो रही है, उसके लिए जो कुछ अच्छे शब्दों का इस्तेमाल किया है, उसके लिए मैं उनका आभारी हूँ। इसके साथ ही जो उनका प्रश्न है, यह प्रश्न वैसे तो इस प्रश्न से जुड़ा हुआ नहीं है, फिर भी मैं उनको इतना जरूर कहना चाहूंगा कि एअरपोर्ट इन्फ्रास्ट्रक्चर आज हमारे लिए सबसे बड़ी चुनौती है और इसके लिए हर कदम बहुत मुस्तैदी से उठाए जा रहे हैं। यह जो एक ग्रोथ हुआ है, एक्सप्लोजिव ग्रोथ हुआ है पिछले वर्ष में, हवाई सेवाओं में, उसकी वजह से आम तौर पर बड़े शहरों के जो हमारे हवाई अड्डे हैं, वहां हमें कंजेस्चन भी काफी महसूस हो रहा है और इसके लिए हम पूरे कदम उठा रहे हैं। साथ ही साथ जो पायलट की ट्रेनिंग और जो कोहरे की वजह से दिक्कतें हो रही हैं, उसके लिए निश्चित रूप से कुछ कदम उठाए जा रहे हैं, जिसका फायदा आने वाले दिनों में उनको महसूस होगा।

SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA: Mr. Chairman, Sir, India has signed air services agreements with 97 countries. Out of these 97 agreements, India is utilising only 46 agreements. And out of these, Indian Airlines and Air India use only 20 per cent. So, how would the proposed aircraft acquisition and already inducted 18 aircraft increase the percentage? Why are you not inducting at least two or three A-380s? What measures the Ministry is taking to improve Indian Airlines and Air India's entitlements on the various routes?

SHRI PRAFUL PATEL: Sir, the hon. Member has rightly suggested that we are having air-services agreement with many countries, and we are unable to utilise the full capacity of these bilateral agreements. However, just for your information, signing air-services agreements does not mean necessarily that we do operate or every country in the world operates flights to those countries where air-services agreements are there.

However, one of the reasons why India has not been able to make full utilization is that our national carrier has suffered on account of capacity constraints. That is one of the reasons why, at the present juncture, we are looking at the acquisition of aircraft. As an immediate measure, Air India and Indian Airlines, both, are in the process of acquiring aircraft. For your information, in Air India, the 18 aircraft that you have mentioned are the B-737-800 series aircraft, which are primarily for the low-cost operation Air India Express.

The other 50 aircraft are for the parent company, which are the wide-bodied aircraft. The process of acquisition is still not complete. The Air India Board is examining the various options before them. But I can assure you that with the induction of improved aircraft, our Airlines will definitely be catering to many more cities, many more countries, than they are presently doing.

SHRI ANAND SHARMA: Sir, the hon. Minister's answer about the improvement of the in-flight services and airports is definitely appreciable. But, Sir, India is one of those countries, which have two national carriers; we have the Air India and the Indian Airlines. As the hon. Minister has admitted himself, because of the constraints of the aircraft, we have not been able to utilise routes. This matter has come up in the past in this House, in the previous two Sessions also. At what stage is the acquisition process of the aircraft for both Air India and Indian Airlines? Because, what has been stated in the reply...

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have put your questio

SHRI ANAND SHARMA: Sir, what has been stated in the reply is only about the acquisition of 18 aircraft for the Air India Express, not acquisition of the 50 aircraft, as the hon. Minister has indicated, for Air India. How many of them are for the Indian Airlines? Has the Expression of Interest been received? Which are the airlines, or the aircraft manufacturers who have given the Expression of Interest? Secondly, Sir...

MR. CHAIRMAN: That is enough, not more than one question at a time.

SHRI ANAND SHARMA: Sir, this is about the international offers. The international offers of the national carriers, either of Air India and Indian Airlines, have not gone through. What is his Ministry doing about that?

SHRI PRAFUL PATEL: Sir, I must respectfully submit that the process of acquisition of aircraft for both the carriers is underway. Just for the information of hon. Members present here, for the Indian Airlines, 43 airlines of the Airbus family have been selected long before and the process is going on. The PIB has completed its work. The Price Negotiation Committee is sitting with them to see what is the best possible price that we could get under the present circumstances. Once that process is complete, I think, very soon, the matter would go to the CCA for final approval. Then, of course, the company takes the final decision on placing the orders. But I expect that the proposal of the Indian Airlines would move much faster, because much headway has already been made.

On Air India, about the 18 aircraft which I had mentioned, that decision has already been taken. At the moment the process is at the PIB stage. The identification of these aircraft, evaluation and other issues, have all been settled.

Coming to the other issues about the 50 aircraft, the hon. Member has asked why we are not buying A-380 aircraft. As I have said, decisions on which aircraft to buy, and such other decisions are not taken at the level of the Government. The Airlines themselves assess their requirements. The techno-economic feasibility is looked at by them and, once the board of the Airlines proposes, only then the Government comes into the picture as to how to take the next step forward.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That is enough.

SHRI PRAFUL PATEL: However, I can assure you that in this year, 2005, we would, hopefully, have completed the process for Air India and Indian Airlines.

**Question No. 188 [The questioner (Shri Raj Kumar Dhoot) was absent. For answer vide page 46].*

Task Force on Revival of Co-operative Credit Institutions

*189. SMT. AMBIKA SONI:
DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:†

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Task Force on revival of Co-operative credit institutions in its final report has called for radical changes in the way the co-operative credit societies are constituted, managed and regulated;